

ADEPT Political Commentaries

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Modernization of the Governing Party

June 20, 2002

All the major events in the socio-political life of the Republic of Moldova are directly related to the policy pursued by the Communist Party (CP), which holds the constitutional majority in the Parliament. During the May plenary session of the Communist Party, the President of the country and Chair of the Communist Party launched an initiative to modernize the governing party. In addition, several weeks later the Communist party media outlet highlighted the need to change the party program as well. Domestic analysts closely monitor both initiatives.

The discussions on modernizing the Communist Party are not new. Immediately after the parliamentary elections of February 25, 2001 a series of problems surfaced, which made the party modernization inevitable. For instance, it took the Communist Party more than a year to overcome the so called "opposition syndrome" leading sometimes to curious situations. For instance in 2001 at the time President Voronin was about to sign the documents on joining the World Trade Organization and Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe some of the Communist Party moguls severely criticized WTO for being a tool of the American imperialism, and Stability Pact for being overshadowed by the "NATO tanks" - thus jeopardizing Moldova's adherence into those structures. Further, mass media largely circulated the statement President Voronin made during the Communist Party Congress of April 2002, reading that "Republic of Moldova would be turned into Europe's Cuba" if there was any threat to the Communist governing.

Currently there are at least a couple of reasons calling for the Communist party modernization. Firstly, the shifting international and regional environment, namely EU and NATO extension, strategic partnership of the neighborhood countries with other institutions. Secondly, Republic of Moldova has found itself under the close monitoring of the Council of Europe. And last but not least, political parties are getting ready for the upcoming local elections due in May 2003. All these factor being by the economic instability and blocked foreign aid.

Under those circumstances, the Communist Party has organized in May and June a series of training seminars for the party activists aimed to explain why modernization is necessary. In addition to the usual discussions on the lack of competitive personnel and the need to recruit new young and trained members at issue was the idea that CP fails to achieve its strategic goals in economy because of obstruction from foreign international financial institutions. Previously the CP explained its failure to keep the promises it made to the electorate by the intransigent position of the opposition, especially that of the Christian-Democratic Peoples' Party. Apparently, Communist Party resorts to those arguments to convince its supporters that the party modernization is imposed by the factors outside their control.

On June 15 the Communist Party organized a scientific conference to evaluate the results of its one-year governing. The conference gathered leaders of political parties sharing socialist and social-democratic doctrines. This is a breakthrough, one that cannot be ignored. One could say that President Vladimir Voronin has made the first step towards rectifying the mistake he made when launching the "Social Pact". Within the framework of the Social Pact

the President intended to hold talks with representatives of civil society, except for political parties whom he labeled as "political vagabonds". Clearly, given its modernization initiative the Communist Party would definitely need the support of left wing parties, which might eventually become its allies. A would-be alliance with the socialist and social-democratically oriented parties might cushion the reformation shocks the Party might experience, especially as it already faces a lot of challenges. Despite the economic achievements the party is reporting (a 6.1% growth in 2001), many experts do not hesitate to question them. They claim it's nothing but a statistic manipulation, as an economic growth would have inevitably resulted in increased energy consumption and increased budget earnings. However, none of those was registered last year, further the budget deficit was 15%.

Another factor pointing to the seriousness of President Voronin intention are the recent structural and personnel changes in the presidential administration, which is to play the role of the generator of reforms. There is indication that the President's reformatory initiatives would differ a lot from those of the dogmatic wing of the Communist Party. The fact that conservative members of the Communist Party continue to attend the plenary sessions of the Union of the USSR Communist Parties proves that the reformation of the party won't be easy. The recent session of the Union illustrated that the Communist Party of Russia saw the Communist Parties of the former Republics as its own branches. The report of the Union of the USSR Communist Parties "On fighting the governors' extremism and coordinating joint initiatives of the Communist parties in view of defending workers' rights and citizens' democratic freedoms" points to the fact that Russian Communists failed even to notice that in Moldova the Communist party is a governing party. One might have consider the above as mere curiosities if it were not for President Voronin's emphasis on the need to consolidate the independent state - Republic of Moldova.

Political opponents might blame Communist Party for insincerity as on the one hand it talks about the country independence and on the other it is a member of a union of parties of a country not longer existing, but which they intend to rebuild. Further, the contradictions within the Communist Party are even more obvious when the President launches liberal initiatives, whereas other party moguls call for adopting *ciuci he* ideas of the North-Korean Communism. It is worth mentioning that the situation is very similar to the Korean one. There, there is a single nation divided in two countries, a Communist one and a liberal one. North-Koreans inspired by the *ciuci he* build communism and atomic bomb while starving. South-Koreans lead a simple life and invade the world market with *hi-tech* products. North-Koreans ask for the permission of their beloved leader to have national celebrations and are very enthusiastic when his majesty is indulgent, while millions of South-Koreans invade the streets to celebrate the victory of their football team over Italy and its qualifying for the World Cup semi-finals.

Getting ready for May 2003 local elections

June 14, 2002

A whole set of events this month point to the fact that the major political parties of country are getting ready for local elections due in May 2003. Rather, they resumed pre-electoral activities, interrupted by the ruling of the Constitutional Court outlawing early local elections set for April 7, 2002.

Numerous factors force major political parties engage in the third local electoral race (after the independence of the Republic of Moldova was proclaimed on August 27, 2002 local elections were held on April 16, 1995 and May 23, 1999). In 1995 and 1999 local elections took place a year after parliamentary elections and their results once again confirmed those of the parliamentary elections, thus presented no relevance. Upcoming elections differ significantly from this point of view. An illustration in this respect was the electoral campaign launched in February 2002 in view of early local elections. As mentioned before, Constitutional Court outlawed those elections, on the grounds that it is unconstitutional to terminate the mandates of elected officials. However, the false start highlighted several tendencies, which would likely be valid in 2003 as well.

Firstly, it showed that four major players will engage in the electoral race, namely (from left to right): Communist Party (CP); Social Democratic Alliance (SDA); Independents' Alliance (IA); and Christian-Democratic Peoples' Party (CDPP). It is likely that the other 25 political parties registered with the Ministry of Justice will cluster around those key players. Certainly, there would be parties willing to run separately just to check their electoral rating. Secondly, the false start highlighted that the same electoral techniques are being used, i.e. denigration of big players via circulation of compromising materials on one hand, and usage of administrative levers by the incumbent governing on the other. And finally, there are indications that the confrontation between CP and CDPP is likely to continue until local elections of 2003.

During its last plenary session Communist Party initiated a campaign targeted at party modernization. The campaign is aimed firstly to recruit new personalities to the party, from different fields of activity, and thus to address the "shortage of staff" problem and also make CP image more attractive in the upcoming elections. Secondly, recently the governing party made public its intention to appoint deputy prefects to the rayons (districts) in line with its intention to revise the administrative-territorial division of the country. According to some domestic experts, would-be deputy prefects would be the ones to use the party "administrative levers". Thirdly, the recent initiative of Prime Minister Vasile Tarlev to prohibit the use of "Romanian language" is once again the factor that used to divide Moldovan electorate.

The Communist governing has all the reasons to regret its failure to hold early local elections on April 7, 2002. In 2003 it would face some tough economic and financial problems. In particular, this year Moldova would have to pay to foreign institutions a debt equaling nearly 2/3 of its state budget. And this in the context of blocked foreign funding, and lack of income from privatization of state property. Secondly, Moldovan sugar exports to Ukraine have been stopped, as were those of food industry to Romania. Besides the economic damages to be

incurred by Moldova, Communist governing image would also have to suffer due to their failure to support "domestic producers". And finally, prohibition to use "Romanian language" phrase could be speculated on only in the rural environment. In Chisinau Municipality, the biggest stronghold in the local elections, this might have an opposite effect.

SDA headed by the former Prime-Minister Dumitru Braghis, engaged in campaign for local elections when the initiative on a "permanent round table" had been launched in April. The idea of a permanent roundtable aimed at facilitating the dialogue between the opposition and Communist governing occurred after Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly had passed a resolution on the functioning of democratic institutions in the Republic of Moldova. Another of SDA actions falling within its propaganda campaign is the collection of 200,000 signatures (about 10% of the registered voters) in support of a legislative referendum. The referendum is to be held on replacing the current proportional electoral system with a mixed one (50% of the deputies would be elected on the party lists, and the other 50% in the single mandate districts). Both initiatives have drawn other smaller parties to the SDA. Thus, it becomes a focal point for center-left and center-right parties who disagree both with the Communists' and Christian-Democrats' policy.

Independents' Alliance headed by the Chisinau Mayor, Serafim Urechean, has also showed itself at the beginning of June. Alliance leader took part in the Congress of Local and Regional Power of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg. Among other things the Congress heard a report on the situation in the Republic of Moldova. In his capacity as Federation leader Urechean could monitor the democracy in the Republic of Moldova, which would be at issue in November in Strasbourg. This position enables the Alliance to draw on its side other political parties, which potentially might form an electoral alliance in the 2003 electoral campaign. On the other hand, SDA has all the chances to overrun IA. The fact is that in February, the Alliance managed to draw 10 parties on its side. Though, Ureachean's exclusive interest in being reelected as the capital Mayor scared all of them away. Some of them have now turned to the SDA Furthermore, allegations made by governmental press as well as the one controlled by the Communist Party and Christian-Democrats on Urechean's involvement in corruption scandals once again point to the fact that Ureachean is an easy target.

As usual, last week Christian Democrats made an interesting move. During a party municipal conference, CDPP delegates elected incumbent deputy party Chair, Vlad Cubreacov, as the Chair of the Municipality Primary Organization. The move is aimed to designate Vlad Cubreacov as candidate to the Chisinau Mayoralty, and top candidate on the list for the election of municipal council. CDPP has been gaining grounds recently, fact confirmed by the 2001 parliamentary elections. After anti-Communist protest rallies organized by the CDPP, and Vlad Cubreacov's kidnapping the latter has become a significant personality on the Moldovan political scenery. Given police failure to discover Vlad Cubreacov for two months, public attention attached to his figure will continue to be high, which might prove to be an advantage during the electoral campaign.

Cubreacov's chances in elections are very high. He has all the grounds to count on the second round. Given that the incumbent Mayor is attacked both by his right-wing and left-wing opponents, and mass media's reluctance to support him unconditionally as it used to in 1999 elections, Ureachean's rating will inevitably decrease, fact already indicated by the opinion polls.

Communists also have no grounds to count on a high rating of their candidate. Social and economic problems, damaged relations with the neighborhood countries, confused ideological orientation, corruption scandals - all of them could result in low rating of the CP candidate. Despite Communist's claims that they don't have problems with professional HR, they still need to identify a candidate. Certainly, CP might promote an independent candidate, though the consequences of such a move are difficult to predict.

So, CDPP has all the chances for its candidate, namely Vlad Cubreacov, to draw more than the usual 12% it received in the Chisinau municipality. If CDPP candidate gets to the second round, CDPP might appeal to citizens to elect between "Christian-Democratic democracy and Communist authoritarian regime" or between an "honest and an compromised candidate". The second is less likely, though no less likely than CDPP candidate in the second round. Would the other 25 democratic parties oppose such an appeal? No way! They would have to ally with CDPP. Given that upcoming elections would test voters' confidence in the Communist governing and would be a prelude for the 2005 parliamentary elections, CDPP' victory might have a great impact, especially as the Communists' rating in Chisinau equals to about 43%.

A new political situation

June 3, 2002

More than a year passed since President Vladimir Voronin issued the decree in May 15, 2001 on the resolution of the Transdnistrian conflict highlighting it as being top priority of the Moldovan authorities. Hence authorities failed to resolve the conflict, furthermore the negotiation process has been in a deadlock for 9 months now. Nevertheless, the great majority of the political leaders approve Voronin's stance toward the separatist regime.

Transdnistria has found itself in a quite difficult situation. The financial situation has worsened dramatically, further the September 11 events have scattered all the hopes for a would-be support from Russia and Ukraine. And that's because United States and European Union's increasing interest in the conflict regions of the Former URSS. An illustration of this is that last year European Union and US summoned Ukraine to observe the international norms on exports, when allowing exports from Transdnistria through its territory.

Several months later, in February 2002 Steven Pifer of the US State Department undertook a visit in Moldova and Transdnistria. In April Rudolf Perina, former US Ambassador to Moldova, currently State Department Special Coordinator on Conflict Resolution in the former URSS undertook a similar visit. American officials' message was clear - US would never recognize Transdnistria's independence, in addition the conflict should be resolved by observing the principles developed in 1993 by OSCE. Noteworthy, OSCE representatives have recently visited Moldova among other things to probe the possibility of re-launching the negotiation process. Finally, US interest in the resolution of the Transdnistrian conflict was reflected in the *Declaration on the New Strategic Relationships between United States and Russia* signed by George W. Bush and Vladimir Putin on May 24, 2002. The declaration reads that United States and Russia will cooperate in view of regional conflict resolution, including in Transdnistria.

The shifting political environment forced Transdnistrian leaders to react in a certain manner. As a rule to justify their reluctance to take part in the elaboration of Transdnistria's status they used to resort to the trick - economic problems first and then political ones. That situation has lasted for 10 years now, period enough for the Transdnistria to become self-sufficient due to the low prices on energy sources and Chisinau's lack of control over their exports. Under those circumstances the issue of Transdnistrian status within the Republic of Moldova has been always adjourned.

After September 2001 change in Chisinau's policy regarding the separatist regime and the introduction of new customs seals the negotiation formula has been inverted - juridical status first and in exchange new customs seals. Separatist leaders weren't happy with that formula so they launched a denigration campaign against Moldovan Communist authorities and even resorted to such actions as undisguised provocations. Firstly they insinuated there's nobody to negotiate with in Chisinau on the grounds that there is an inconsistency between Moldova and Transdnistria's constitutional regimes. Further, Transdnistrian press circulated rumors regarding a possible collapse of Chisinau regime given severe internal problems, especially protest rallies and Gagauzian crisis. Council of Europe involvement in settling Moldovan crisis, including the Gagauzian one, spoiled Transdnistria's plans to call to rebel Gagauzian leaders. The latter had to comply with Council of Europe recommendations on peaceful

resolution of the conflict. In response Transdnistrian press labeled Gagauz leaders as villains, although previously it used to praise their patriotic ardor targeted against Chisinau.

All those facts point to the effect that the negotiation process on Transdnistrian conflict may resume in the nearest future. Both pro-Transdnistrian oriented Russian press and Tiraspol one report that the federalization of Moldova might be accepted as a possible variant of the conflict resolution. In Chisinau also, during a permanent roundtable launched by the former Prime Minister Dumitru Braghis, at issue was the federalization of Moldova as a possible variant of conflict resolution. For this to happen the Constitution of the Republic of Moldova needs to be amended and the figures that blocked the negotiation process over the last 10 years need to be replaced.

Apparently the resolution is close. Anticipating the strategic agreement between Bush and Putin, on May 23 Ukraine's Council of Defense and National Security headed by Leonid Cucima passed a resolution providing that on July 9 (on the 5th anniversary of the Charter on Ukraine and NATO partnership) Ukraine would apply for NATO membership. Certainly, Ukraine doesn't want to be overshadowed by Russia for which a very special place is reserved within NATO. Russian press reacted immediately labeling Ukraine's decision as a "strategic betrayal".

Such a sudden change in the geo-strategic situation may once again be a cause of major frustrations for Moldova with its disoriented foreign policy. The fate of Presidents' initiatives of Euro-Asian integration is absolutely unclear. In mid-May President Voronin probed the possibilities of Moldova's integration in the Euro-Asian Union. Moldova has been accepted as an observer member to the union. Two weeks later, during the second reunion of the Presidents of Central and Eastern European States held in Slovenia, Voronin discussed the possibilities of Moldova's integration in the European Union.

It is known for a fact that the simultaneous integration in both structures is impossible. Even the gradual integration - firstly in the Euro-Asian Union and later on in the European Union, cited by the Moscow analysts doesn't make too much sense for the simple reason that Euro-Asian Union would never join the European Union.

Tiraspol leaders promptly grasped the latest developments in the international politics. They understood that in the context of the recent Ukraine's initiative, Tiraspol has regained its strategic importance for Russia, although after the 2001 Communists' victory in elections Russia tended to be on Moldova's side. Noteworthy, two weeks after the celebration of the 10th anniversary of the separatist security forces, the speech of Chief of Security Vladimir Antiufiev was published. It reads that there is no other alternative for Transdnistria than edifying an independent state. Strangely enough just when it seemed that the things were clearing out, separatist leaders are nurturing hopes of a possible life buoy from Russia.

There are some indications that separatists drafted a new strategy after the *Declaration on New Strategic Relationships between United States and Russia* was signed. In fact the reason d'etre of the Transdnistrian separatism made public by President Voronin, namely survival of Smirnov clan and swindle of the breakaway region economy, has been known for a long time. However, it still amazes how Transdnistrian regime is able to rapidly adjust to the changing environment. Thus, at the beginning of the 90's Transdnistrian statehood was justified by the

need to defend linguistic rights of the so-called *Transdnistrian nation* against the Romanian nationalism. In 1991-92 Transdnistria's existence was justified by the need to rebuild the Soviet Union. Later on, after the bloody dissolution of the Russian State Duma in 1993, Transdnistrian regime pretended to be the main promoter of the Russia's interests in the Balkans. And finally, after the Communists victory in Moldova, the existence of the Transdnistrian regime was justified by the need to prevent Chisinau authorities, which aim at reviving the bolshevism, from taking hold of the economic potential of the region.

Acknowledging that for certain economic reasons Russia cannot yet become a self-sufficient power, and that President Putin has made a strategic decision to closer ties with the West, Tiraspol leaders now insinuate that Transdnistria might serve the needs of NATO extension and that Moldovan Communist regime is a major obstacle in this respect. This seems rather as a dazzle aimed to show the frustration with Russia, which is loosing a strategic region to the United States. However, the idea separatist leaders are hopelessly trying to promote so as to preserve an equal status to Chisinau at the negotiation table is that - upon federalization or co-federalization of the Republic of Moldova Transdnistria would be the only hope for the country de-Communization. This is the more important as the prominent leaders of the ruling Communist Party are discussing seriously to adopt *chiuchi he* ideals of the North Korean Communists.

Transdnistria's arguments are not to be neglected. Firstly, during the last presidential elections Smirnov simply humiliated the Communist candidate who was cast only 2% of the valid votes. Secondly, Communists are also to be blamed for triggering Gagauzia conflict. And last but not least, the de-Communization of the Republic of Moldova via free and fair elections with the participation of the opposition seems so unreal at the moment that political analysts are speculating how would Moldovan political scenery look like after the expiration of Voronin's second presidential mandate.

Public Control

July 29, 2002

Lately, public bodies, especially Presidency have launched a series of initiatives, draft laws aimed to draw the public attention. One of those initiatives is the draft law on public control over the state. Certainly one can only salute authorities' intention to keep a permanent dialogue with all the segments of the society. However, very often authorities' good intentions degenerate into propaganda campaigns aimed to hide their real purpose.

At the meeting with NGO community hosted on March 22, the President came up with the initiative of a permanent dialogue with the civil society and called it to sincerely and honestly voice its position on issues of public interest, so that later on authorities could take them into account. In fact though, one may find that authorities tend to turn to NGO community only afterwards, when nothing could be done. This happened on several occasions. Let's take the case of the draft on public control over the state activity. The Presidency developed it without being asked by the NGO community. Surely we could all agree that this is good initiative, the question is - would it be of any use? Firstly, the draft simply reiterates certain provisions of the Constitution, international acts, or laws in force. Secondly, some of the draft provisions are rather ambiguous. For instance, paragraph 5 of Article 4 reads: *"The option to live is the basic principle of the civil society vitality in the Republic of Moldova. In this respect, the state guarantees to everyone the right to exercise the rights and freedoms they are enjoying"*. By reading this paragraph, we could only wonder what happens to those unsatisfied with the rights they are entitled to, or what if they want some additional rights? Or, this paragraph refers only to those inclined to suicide, as they may not contribute to the vitality of the civil society, consequently, after death the state does not guarantee them the rights they enjoyed during the lifetime?

Right from the beginning the draft defines the civil society as "a structured, non-governmental, and autonomous entity of the Moldovan people, including political parties, public associations, and other citizens' associations". Further, the draft provides for the certain rights civil society enjoys, however it's not clear whether ordinary citizens, who are not members of a political party or public association, may enjoy them as well.

If we are to admit that there are structured entities, such as the journalist NGO community, or the NGO Council, which represents at least 120 non-governmental organizations participants to the Forum, or even the Permanent Round Table established by the political parties in line with Council of Europe recommendations, than how their interests have been taken into account when the Presidency developed the draft? One wouldn't be wrong when saying that their opinion has been simply ignored.

In fact during the 11 years of independence of the Republic of Moldova civil society organizations have asked nothing but access to information of public interest, access to public media outlets so as to voice different opinions, and access to justice against abuses of public bodies. However, the draft law developed by the Presidency makes no reference to the Law on Access to Information or the Law on Administrative Litigation, which if perfected might prove to be more useful to the civil society than the series of phrases and principles taken from various documents and incorporated in the Presidential draft.

Or let's take another example, when the journalist NGOs proffered a draft on transforming the Teleradio-Moldova State Company into a public institution. Here, deputies again gave preference to the draft developed by the Presidency, ignoring the criticism of the Council of Europe. The journalists' draft provided for the most adequate representation of the interests of "structured entities of the Moldovan people" in the Coordination Council, rather than mere interests of the parliament majority, which elects both the President and Government.

In a related note, it's worth mentioning that recently the Parliament, Presidency and Government appointed new members to the Certification Commission (certifying the public benefit of the non-governmental organization) without even consulting the former members of the Commission or the NGO Council. Indeed, the said institutions have all the right to act as they wish, and nobody doubts the quality of the newly appointed members, the only thing is that the later are unknown to the Moldovan NGO community and cannot represent its interest in the Commission. Further, continuity in the Commission activity and learning from the experience of the previous membership might have been very useful. Or, is the permanent dialogue conceived as a mere mechanism by which authorities show their illuminist generosity when they enlighten civil society with all kinds of initiatives, and it responds to them by kneeling in satisfaction?

Federalization of the Republic of Moldova

July 17, 2002

Two weeks after the proposal on the federalization of the Republic of Moldova had been presented at the reunion of Russia, Ukraine, OSCE, Republic of Moldova and Transdnistria in Kiev; President Voronin praised it and saluted OSCE's initiative to federalize the country. The President appealed to his fellow citizens and asked them to "be wise and don't be fooled by those who for many years contributed to the country disintegration".

The President expressed his opinion on the initiative only after the opposition had an opportunity to debate the draft Agreement for a week in the governmental media outlets. Certainly, the President intended to hear the opposition first, which criticized the federalization altogether, and speak out afterwards. He and the government controlled media counted that the opposition would severely criticize the initiative and that the President would support it. This move was supposed to highlight on the one hand the retrograde stance taken by opposition pleading for the conservation of the conflict, and on the other hand the innovating stance of the President who promotes an Agreement "supported by Europe" in an effort to reintegrate "the land of our dear motherland". However, President's position indicates also the lack of "fair play" in his team. An illustration of this is the way the government controlled media severely criticized not only the parties opposing federalization, but also the Social-Democratic Alliance of Moldova, headed by the former Prime Minister, Dumitru Braghis, who in fact supported the federalization idea. It seems that the governmental press even regrets the fact that Social-Democratic Alliance supports federalization, as the only grounds for criticism they could invoke so as to blame the parties altogether, was that Dumitru Braghis is a former komsomolist.

In fact opposition reacted appropriately, but rather hysterically when it voiced its stance with regard to federalization. Many of the arguments brought up by opposition are grounded, as are its concerns. Firstly, one of the arguments brought by the opposition is that the conflict should be settled by unconditionally observing the Constitution and the laws of the Republic of Moldova. In such a case, the federalization of the country would envisage a referendum and adoption of the Federal Constitution. Problems may arise immediately the parties involved in the conflict, the guarantor countries and OSCE sign such an Agreement. The fact is that the Article 42 of the draft Agreement provides for the supreme legal force thereof. If the Agreement were conceived as internal document of the Republic of Moldova, than it would have substituted the Constitution of the country, fact that is hard to imagine. The Constitution of the Republic of Moldova is a Supreme Law. No law and no legal act running counter to the Constitution provisions may have a legal force. Only the provisions of the international treaties to which Republic of Moldova adhered may have supremacy over its provisions. However, the said Agreement may not enjoy the status of an international treaty. Furthermore, the opposition criticized the draft Agreement as many of its articles are simply copied after the Russian Constitution. And this does not necessarily mean that the opposition questions the quality of the Russian Constitution, even if it was adopted without any public debates at times of political crisis, after October 1993 Putsch. In fact the Constitution draft was developed under presidential councilor, Sergei Shahrailov, so as to guarantee the supremacy of the presidency, i.e. Boris Yeltsin in his fight with the opposition. Moldovan opposition just questioned whether the provisions of the Russian Constitution might be appropriate for the Republic of Moldova.

Needless to say, Moldovan opposition had a hysteric reaction as well. Accusations brought up to OSCE Mission in Chisinau are not exactly fair, as its leadership stated on various occasions that the Mission would only support proposals on Transdnistrian conflict settlement, which would be approved by the parties to the conflict.

If the Presidency accepts the draft Agreement on the federalization of the Republic of Moldova and wants the opposition to get involved in its improvement, it may want to establish a favorable environment for cooperation. In fact, just the opposite happened, as the opposition was blamed for "discord and confrontation". Consequently, under those tough circumstances when it might need the support of the opposition, the power is left alone to decide what would happen next. And this in the context of communists' permanent complaints of lack of professional and well trained human resources. After the treatment it got, the opposition would wait for the power to make the first move and only then criticize it. Consequently, because of their chase for political rating, both the power and opposition are about to miss the chance to work together on a problem of enormous importance for the Republic of Moldova.

Cooperation between NGOs and political parties

July 8, 2002

On June 22 the Agency for Legal Initiatives hosted an international seminar entitled "Making Civil Society Concerns Heard: Prospects and Problems of NGOs' Cooperation with Political Parties" in Kiev. The conference gathered representatives of NGOs from the Republic of Moldova, Mongolia, Russia and Ukraine. Association for Participatory Democracy "ADEPT" and Institute for Public Policies represented Republic of Moldova.

This issue is not new at all. The cooperation between NGOs and political parties is in fact very natural, as both are public associations and represent the so-called civil society. In this respect joining their efforts according to certain principles might prove extremely useful in strengthening civil society. Nevertheless, the goals and methodology of NGOs and political parties differ a lot. NGOs are established for citizens to exercise their right to association and to pursue goals set by the founders and proponents. NGOs may either pursue a public or a mutual interest. Although political parties are established under the same right to free association, their goal is to legally accede to power by selling their governing programs to the electorate. That is exactly why very frequently political parties are considered to be some sort of interface between the society and state bodies.

As the goals pursued by political parties are different one may wonder if by cooperating with them NGOs may impair their image of unpartisan organizations? This is not mere a rhetoric questions as it is provided for in the incumbent legislation of the Republic of Moldova. Thus, in the 1996 presidential race the major players Petru Lucinschi and Mircea Snegur enjoyed the support of 60-70 NGOs each. Back then the society witnessed a race for securing public declarations of support from as many NGOs as possible. By this, candidates' image-makers sought to highlight which of the candidates enjoys a greater "support of the civil society".

One of the results of such a massive NGO support to electoral contestants was the adoption of the Law on Public Associations several months latter. The law distinguished between public and mutual benefit organizations; the latter enjoying larger fiscal and other kind of incentives. One of the criteria for receiving public benefit status, issued by the Certification Commission of the Ministry of Justice is for the NGO to be non-partisan with no previous records of publicly supporting electoral contestants. The NGO, which supports an electoral contestant might be entitled to some privileges as long as the relevant contestant wins elections, otherwise if it loses elections the NGO might expect a discriminatory treatment from the winner. Both ways, involvement in politics may impair NGO's image as non-partisan. However, open support of contestants isn't prohibited, just that those NGOs may not claim public benefit status. In such a case they are regarded as organizations of mutual benefit of those, who support a certain political party.

The Law had a positive impact, so that in the next 3 electoral campaigns NGOs refrained from publicly supporting political parties. At the same time the Law was an occasion to speak about ways of NGO involvement in politics. Indeed, Moldova NGOs organize themselves around their field of interest so as to jointly solve problems, such as environment, human rights, youth, gender, etc. Those organizations may not ignore public policies in the relevant fields promoted by the parties in governing and cannot refrain from expressing their standpoint on those policies as long as those policies affect public interest. Therefore, NGOs

positions are the more credible the less partisan NGOs are. It seems that the Moldovan NGO community has reached the conclusion that a difference should be made between NGO's

involvement in politics (by publicly supporting political parties and governing programs), and NGO promotion of public policies for the public interest without any ideological implication. If guided by the assumption that NGO should have nothing to do with the public policies, then NGOs would have to forget about the dialogue initiated by President Vladimir Voronin within the framework of a Social Pact, especially as the president is also the Chair of the Communist Party. In such a case NGOs would have to isolate themselves, just at the time authorities are willing to "edify a civil society in the Republic of Moldova". Though, many skeptical analysts claim it is hard to distinguish between political involvement and promotion of accountable public policies. In this respect, the difference between a NGO and political party is that between a miss and a Mrs., the former is still free to choose, the latter has already made its choice and is bound to it.

In the Republic of Moldova relationships between NGOs and political parties are not exactly perfect. Immediately after 2001 parliamentary elections when the great majority of democratically oriented parties failed, a series of pretended "independent" media outlets, but in fact partisan ones, claimed that the victory of the Communist Party is due to "the absence of civil society in the Republic of Moldova". Those allegations were addressed to the 2,000 NGOs, which although claimed to be part of civil society, were mere "devours of grants". Of course there is some truth in those allegations, but just a little, as the collapse of democratic parties is the fault of the parties themselves and their leaders.

To avoid such allegations in the future it would be appropriate to clarify the objective and subjective factors of the democrats' loss in elections and actions to be undertaken in view of strengthening civil society.

Firstly, it's the image NGOs and parties enjoy in the society. According to the recent polls, the great majority of citizens trust neither political parties, nor NGOs. However, NGOs enjoy a more positive image in the society than parties and trade unions. Noteworthy, immediately after elections Vladimir Voronin stated that he was very much aware of the fact that the Communist Party won elections not because of its program but rather due to the protest vote of the electorate.

Further, media controlled by political parties worked to denigrate opponent parties. As a result the image of all political leaders had to suffer. Left wing and center-left leaders are accused of coming from URSS nomenclature, which upon the proclamation of independence have turned into democrats so as to take part in the privatization process. As for the right-wing leaders, they are accused of limiting their electorate due to their option for national values instead of generally accepted ones.

Secondly, democratic parties failed in the 2001 parliamentary elections due to the fact that in the 11 years of independence living standards had considerably declined, so that the nostalgia for the relative stability and welfare of the soviet times has been recurring. Finally, the political and corruption scandals involving leaders of democratic parties, especially those of the Alliance of Democratic Forces in governing between 1998 - 2000 greatly eroded their image, although it wasn't proved that those allegations were grounded. Interestingly enough

citizens are not the only ones to believe those allegations, as leaders of parties themselves share the same belief with regard to their political rivals. That is why political leaders keep calling for alliance of the parties of the same spectrum, but with rare exceptions those alliances never happen. An illustration of this may be the Democratic Forum of Moldova. It was established three months after the 2001 parliamentary elections, as a self-defense and "unification of democratic forces" reaction against the policies of the Communist Party, however it only survived for several months.

Another factor dictating the electorate behavior is the democrats' failure to speak on the voters' language. That is why only left-wing parties, which promise to solve social problems are able to pass the threshold of representation. Domestic analysts explain this by the absence of a middle class, which in democratic countries account for the great majority of the population, ensure political stability in the country, and vote for center-left and center-right parties. "Middle class" is distinguished according to its income, which may entitle them to a certain living standard and to certain personal freedom. As the basic values of the civil society are pluralism and citizens' free initiative, one may claim that civil society values are in fact those shared by the middle class, consequently strengthening civil society goes hand in hand with the development of a middle class.

As the Communist Party claims to edify a civil society in the Republic it should be aware of the fact that what it intends to edify is a middle class, defined in the Marxist theory as the "small bourgeoisie". Marxist leaders wrote in the first chapter of the Communist Manifesto entitled "Bourgeoisie and Proletarians" that the bourgeoisie was the one to "awake the great majority of citizens from the stupid somnolence of the rural life". Needless to say that in the Republic of Moldova at the beginning of the XXI century rural population outnumber urban population. As for the bourgeoisie, or middle class, in the last century it was annihilated in Moldova whenever it managed to full-fledge. Consequently a major goal for the Moldovan political elite striving to edify a civil society, should be boosting middle class. Leaders of the Communist Party have already announced the modernization of the party and even revision of their program. They also pointed to the need of revising the Constitution in such a manner so as to satisfy any party acceding to power. It is encouraging that Communist Party talks about values shared by the entire political spectrum. International political situation, i.e. integration processes worldwide and in Europe, has also pushed the governing party in the same direction.

However, it would be naive for us to expect that a strong middle class aware of its political and economic needs might appear soon. Even under favorable political and economic situations, it would take quite a time. In this respect some of the major challenges to be met would be social culture and civic education. And this is exactly the field where NGOs and political parties could efficiently cooperate.

Firstly, NGOs may assist political parties in identifying and educating community leaders on leadership, communication skills, etc. In fact NGOs are already doing such kind of work. Quite a number of grassroots leaders benefited of the community development projects undertaken by NGOs. Those models may be replicated in other rural communities. It is too early to speak about a mass community movement, however success stories should not be neglected. After addressing community problems often enough those leaders start looking for parties able to offer national and regional programs addressed to grassroots social problems.

Thus, community leaders and political parties might find common grounds. An example in this respect was shared by Serbian youth organizations with Moldovan counterparts in May. NGO leaders of Serbia refrain from electioneering in favor of political parties, rather they promote successful initiatives in solving community or neighborhood problems. In electoral campaigns, it's enough for those leaders who managed to gain the trust of the community, to hint the candidate they regard as reliable, for that candidate to be in the top of electorate's preferences. In Moldova also, political parties are looking for would-be grassroots leaders, but by doing so they resort to promises, which as a rule are not kept. In this respect Serbian strategy may prove more successful. For instance, Communist party has recently launched an initiative aimed to identify leaders for the upcoming local elections from among the entrepreneurs popular in the community. This may be an indication that the Communist party understands the importance of reviving middle class.

Secondly, there is quite a number of NGOs able to provide assistance and consultation to political parties on various issues. NGOs could provide trainings in other fields as well. Further, there are several think-tank NGOs, in fact two types. The first type includes NGOs favoring a certain political doctrine and preferring to cooperate with parties embodying such a doctrine. For instance, Socium-Moldova Foundation cooperates with social-democratic oriented political parties. Institute of Social Technologies prefers to work with the Communist Party. The second type does not give preference to any political doctrine, while conducting studies and polls on the most important problems society is facing. Illustration of such think-tanks is Institute for Public Policies, as well as NGOs working in specific fields Institute for Social Initiatives "Viitorul" - public administration; Association for Participatory Democracy "ADEPT" - elections, political parties, NGOs. It's true there are think-tanks within the parties themselves or within media outlets, however they have a different status.

The above factors of cooperation greatly depend on the self-organizations of NGOs. In the last years Moldovan NGO community seems to have found a certain form of self-organization and launch very good projects. Certainly, in self-organizing Moldovan NGOs follow the same path as their Central and Eastern European counterparts. The regional NGO Forums aiming at identifying the most active NGOs in the region embody the first level of self-organization. The Sector Forums are becoming a tradition as well, for example Forum of the Environmental NGOs, Youth NGOs, Gender NGOs, etc. National NGO Forums embody the second level of self-organization. Since 1997 three such forums have already been organized. Delegates to the forum are selected based on the following criteria: performance, territorial, and field of activity. The Forums focus on the major challenges of the NGO community, decide on joint initiatives, partnership with government and business, etc. Further, the Forum elects the NGO Council entrusted to implement the Forum Resolutions as well as to monitor the development of the sector and represent its interests in relations with other parties. In their activity Council members are guided by a Code of Best Practices and do voluntary work. The Council Chair is elected by rotation from among the Council members. After three National NGO Forums and two NGO Fairs, NGOs reached the conclusion that the Council should represent only the NGOs participating at the Forum, so as to enable the rest of NGOs out of 2,700 to find other ways of self-organization. If self-organization is based on best practices' standards, the risks of scissions or conflicts within NGOs are very slim.

Last year Moldovan NGO community launched the idea of organizing a Civic Forum, a framework for NGOs, political parties, trade unions, and government meet and talk about prospects of the Moldovan NGO sector development. This would have embodied the highest form of self-organization, however the initiative failed to gain support. Political parties were busy healing the wounds of the last electoral campaign. Some of the trade union leaders viewed the initiative as premature, on the grounds that NGOs haven't yet gained the right to talk to such a strong partner as trade unions. Trade unions have thousands of members, they are equal partners to Government and employers' unions at the negotiation table, and who are NGOs? Needless to say, in the middle of political crisis the President of the country launched the idea of a Social Pact and within it's framework host reunions similar to those envisaged in the Civic Forum, however this time the initiative gained the support of both political parties and trade unions. This is encouraging, but there are some risks at stake when the very same initiative is rejected when it comes from NGOs and is supported when it comes from the governing party.

After 2002 political crisis, political parties too realized they need some sort of cooperation mechanism. Thus, at the recommendation of the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly a Permanent Round Table, open to all political parties and NGOs, was set up. The Round table aims to defend and promote democracy and political pluralism in the context of Communist majority in Parliament, which entitles them even to amend the Constitution. There are too many skeptical opinions on the sustainability of such a mechanism for political dialogue. Participants to the roundtable pursue different goals. The skepticism is coupled with suspicions that one political party might take advantage of the roundtable. Nevertheless, the strength of the roundtable is that it joins parties sharing the same values and issuing the same solutions to the problems society is facing, both may lead to sustainable alliances or fusion. Further, political parties participants to the roundtable have appealed to the informational assistance of NGOs, thus proving that cooperation with them is a real advantage.

Is it possible to revise the Constitution?

July 1, 2002

Last week the governmental media launched the idea that the Constitution of the Republic of Moldova needs to be revised. This is the second time since the Communist came to power, that a governmental daily launches the idea of revising the Constitution. Last November it was *Nezavisimaya Moldova*, now it is *Moldova Suverana*. Obviously we witness authorities' attempt to probe the public opinion. Two weeks ago during a scientific conference dedicated to Communists' one year governing, President Vladimir Voronin himself voiced the need to revise the Constitution so as to establish a new framework for the Republic of Moldova development, acceptable to all political parties, which would succeed to power.

Currently, the pretext for the Constitution modification is the speculation that the settlement of the Transdnistrian crisis is close and that at the time a formula for the integration of the breakaway region is being sought. Noteworthy, the negotiations between Chisinau and Tiraspol on the legal status of Transdnistrian region are scheduled for June 1 in Kiev.

For Transdnistrian leaders the compromise solution in the edification of the so-called "common state" is the confederation of sovereign states, or the Montenegro and Serbia model. However, the Chief of the OSCE Mission in Moldova viewed the variant developed by the Transdnistrians as lacking content. It is also known for a fact that Russia, a guarantor country in the negotiation process, favors the federalization rather than con-federalization way of settling the conflict - position voiced by Evghenii Primakov last year, when delegated by Vladimir Putin to represent Russia in settling of Transdnistrian conflict. The formula suggested by Primakov: Moldova not a unitary state, Transdnistria not a sovereign state. Thus, two of the three guarantors, OSCE and Russia oppose the variant suggested by Transdnistria for settling the conflict. It seems, though, that the breakaway leaders are still optimistic. According to them, Voronin only talks about resuming the negotiations, as for the legal status of Transdnistria, Moldovan side has so far failed to devise any solution, which it might put forth at the negotiations. That is why, until it drafts its variant of Transdnistrian status, Chisinau should prove its good intentions and let Tiraspol resume its international trade. Chisinau has been falling in this trap for 10 years now. Once allowed to resume foreign trade, Tiraspol leaders lost any interest in deciding Transdnistrian legal status within the Republic of Moldova.

Given the above said, one may say Moldovan authorities try to substitute discussions on the Transdnistria status with those on Constitution modification, which might allow for the integration of the breakaway region within Republic of Moldova. Indeed, it would be logical for the draft on Transdnistrian status to be publicly debated and simultaneously modifications, which are to be operated in the Constitution to be discussed, so as to find a legal solution to the conflict.

The fact that right from the beginning it was discussed to amend the Constitution in view of a bicameral Parliament, points to the fact that Chisinau is ready to accept federalization as a variant of settling the conflict. It is true that there are bicameral Parliaments in unitary states as well. An illustration of this is France, Romania, as well as other states. But in the case of the Republic of Moldova the bicameral Parliament might prove to be a very tricky trap.

Noteworthy, the leader of the Unitate-Edinstvo Internationalist Movement launched the idea of a bicameral Parliament in the Republic of Moldova nine years ago. Back then the Movement insisted on a bicameral Parliament: Deputies Chamber and Nationalities Chamber. According to them the latter would have been entitled to veto the laws affecting ethnic minorities' rights. Political parties claiming to represent ethnic minorities' rights, such as "Ravnopravie" Socio-political Movement still largely circulate the idea. The idea itself is very dangerous, as any important piece of legislation might be regarded as affecting the interests of ethnic minorities, thus blocking the legislative process. In this case, the President of the country might want to claim as many prerogatives as possible so as to avoid any deadlocks. The previous experience shows that opposition would greatly disagree with such attempts. Another problem is the representation of minorities. If the quotas were to be observed, there would be no need for a Chamber of Nationalities, as minority groups would not hold a majority for the veto, whereas the proportional representation of minorities will be observed in the Deputies' Chamber anyway.

If the said Chamber were to represent the regions then things would be even more complicated. Firstly, it is to be expected that Tiraspol leaders will ally with Comrat for an equal representation of regions in the Superior Chamber so as to totally control it. Otherwise, again there are no reasons for a bicameral Parliament, as it would only generate corruption. From this point of view, Braghis Alliance initiative to elect the Parliament in single-mandate constituencies would have allowed for an adequate representation of the regions in unicameral Parliament, however it was boycotted by the Communists.

In a related note, the recent resignation of the Gagauz Bashkan, Dumitru Croitor, is seen by many experts as an excellent political maneuver, which would enable him to gain grounds, by supporting increased independence of the Gagauz-Yeri, and non-interference of the central authorities in the autonomy's business. That is why the Prime-Minister Vasile Tarlev predicts him an outstanding career. It is believed that Chisinau would like to get rid of Croitor by sending him as an ambassador to some country.

The above said, indicates that Gagauz leaders will speculate the recent conflict so as to negotiate a similar status to that which might be offered to Transdnistria. After the return to the rayon administrative-territorial division it is no longer possible to grant special autonomy to Gagauz-Yeri or Transdnistria, entitling them to more rights than the rayons. And this because it is not possible to have in one state three levels of autonomy with equal representation in the Superior Chamber of Parliament: rayons, Gagauz autonomy and Transdnistrian Republic. The case of Yugoslavia shows that federations based on ethnic criteria, including subjects enjoying different prerogatives are not stable and collapse at the very first tensions. That is why, the idea of relative equality of the three subjects: Republic of Moldova, Transdnistria and Gagauz-Yeri should be accepted.

At the same time it is very unlikely Moldovan authorities would agree to a symmetric federation having regional governments in all three subjects and a single unicameral Parliament at the national level.

That is why, the idea of bicameral Parliament would only further confuse the situation and generate political instability.

The Priorities of the Moldovan Political Forces

September 16, 2002

This week deputies resume their work in Parliament Commissions. The leaders of Parliament factions have already voiced their priorities for the upcoming session. Most likely opposition would exploit the mistakes and abuses made by authorities in observing democratic norms so as to keep them under the watchful eye of international organizations.

On the other hand, leaders of the ruling party announced that their priority for the time being is to lobby social legislation. The latter is aimed at attenuating ruling party's deviation from its program goals and from the promises it made during the last elections. During the last Congress of Chamber of Industry and Commerce, Vladimir Voronin referred to the need of liberalizing economic legislation, reduce state's excessive regulation of economic activity. Such clearly liberal statements were voiced a year ago too, so they aren't new any longer. After being pushed by the international financial organizations, Communist leaders themselves realized what advantages cooperation with IMF and WB brings to the country. Deviation from the party core principles is the price the Communists would have to pay for resumed financial aid and prospective restructuring of the debt to Paris Club upon adopting of the "Poverty Reduction Strategy". This is exactly why the initiative to modernize the party has been launched.

Modernization implies certain risks, including a possible negative perception both from ordinary party members as well as Communist voters. That is why the success of party modernization would greatly depend on administrative or financial levers employed. During the last year ruling party managed to take control over all key positions in the state, including justice, and to promote a personnel policy based on loyalty to incumbent regime. Secondly economic scandals of the last year point to the fact that everything possible is done for persons loyal to the ruling party to take hold of the most profitable businesses in the Republic of Moldova. From this perspective privatization is no longer a threat for the ruling party, as long as persons loyal to the ruling party or countries believed to be strategic partners (read Russia) take hold of the domestic enterprises. An illustration in this respect is the privatization of Moldtelecom. After all, this strategy is needed by Moldovan authorities in order to buy the support of Russian political elite, which does not make a secret of its intentions to take a civilized neo-colonial control over the satellites from the CIS. The worsening relations between Russia and Belarus generated among others by the dissatisfaction of the Russian business with Belarus economic policy on privatization and foreign investments only prove the aforesaid. Consequently for Moldovan leaders the euphemism "strategic partnership" implies strictly and unconditionally following the course dictated by Russia. It's worth mentioning in this respect the declarations of the President or Parliament Chair regarding Republic of Moldova integration in the European Union through Russia-Belarus Union or Eurasia Customs Union. Although simple this policy proved to be a very successful one. However, Russia's option to follow a capitalist path of development imposes an urgent modernization of the ruling Communist party. Otherwise, there are enough political forces in the Republic of Moldova welcoming the strategic partnership with Russia as well as capitalism and ready to replace the Communist Party. The pro-Russian message needs to be constantly updated with new initiatives, such as legalizing Russian military presence on the soil of the Republic of Moldova, reported by the Communist newspaper.

Moldovan citizens' nostalgia for the Communist past is not to be ignored, even if ruling party is promoting a capitalist economic policy. That is why such rituals as the recent visit of Parliament Chair Eugenia Ostapciuc to China are absolutely necessary. For Moldovan authorities China, which combines Communist control over public life with economy based on capitalist principles is a perfect possibility to illustrate that deviations from Communism are not voluntary, but rather inspiration from positive experience. This explains the phenomena that the opposition calls "antidemocratic slippage" of the Communist authorities, which are currently under the scrutiny of the Council of Europe.

One may say that Communists are very good at making their ruling as comfortable as possible. Their deviation from Communist principles is accompanied and camouflaged by an efficient propaganda campaign on social security of the disadvantaged strata of society, whose actions might have a huge impact, i.e.: students who are good at protesting and elderly who are active voters. The initiatives to double scholarships to students and indemnify the deposits (lost as a result of price liberalization carried out by the Russian Government headed by Egor Gaidar) despite lack of funds available is an illustration of the way Communists efficiently pick up their target audiences. There is no doubt that those initiatives are populist. For a long-term impact it would have been better for the Communists to take some legislative measures such as ensuring citizens' deposits, which could be invested in the economic recovery of the country.

The opposition should take into account the fact that the term of 15 years set for recovering lost deposits might be the term Communists intend to stay in power. May be this is enough for the dispersed right-wing opposition to designate a single candidate in the electoral campaigns.

The impact of the Permanent Roundtable

September 9, 2002

Despite the too many skeptical opinions about the viability of the Permanent Round Table (PRT) it seems that its last session with the participation of the political parties of the Republic of Moldova had a wide-scale impact. This fact might determine Moldovan political elite to reconsider the benefit of this mechanism, which was recommended by the Council of Europe in order to initiate a meaningful dialogue between the opposition parties and Communist authorities after January - April political crisis.

Indeed, initially many analysts and political leaders of the country spoke negatively about the Permanent Round Table. The leader of the Christian-Democratic Peoples' Party (CDPP), Iurie Rosca insinuated that the PRT is a finding of the Social Democratic Alliance leader, Dumitru Braghis, so as to form a political alliance in view of the upcoming elections. In this respect we should mention that among the most active supporters of the PRT, besides Social Democratic Alliance, is the Liberal Party, which in fact hosted its sessions for a long time. Other political leaders, in particular that of the Social Democratic Party and Social Liberal Party, indicated that the PRT is "an initiative with no future". They also pointed that the debates held within its framework lack efficiency and are very much similar to the discussions during seminars dedicated to one particular issue, or to a discussion club having no impact whatsoever on political issues.

Those critical attitudes with regard to PRT are supported first of all by the fact that both Communist Party and CDPP, which is considered to be the most ardent opponent of the incumbent governing party, ignored PRT sessions. Consequently the critical attitudes are justified to a certain extent. However, as the time passed Christian-Democrats started attending the sessions, whereas Communists continued to ignore them. One may even say that after the publication of the draft agreement on the federalization of the Republic of Moldova, Christian-Democrats have assumed a leading role in the PRM and even hosted some of its session in their headquarters. This sudden change in the CDPP attitude may be explained by the fact that ruling party fulfilled a part of the PACE recommendations.

The actions recently undertaken by the CDPP point to the fact that this political party still strives to be "the major opposition party and main producer of political events" by resuming the protest rallies. Also Christian-Democrats take into account the fact that a possible decrease of the protest rallies and of the criticism against ruling party may be replaced by enlarging the number of political parties on whose behalf the criticism is made. This is the more important given the upcoming visit of the PACE rapporteurs on the Republic of Moldova. From this perspective the PRT seems to be the perfect political mechanism. Communist Party also understood this and according to Dumitru Braghis attempted to "split the political parties participants to the PRT by recommending them to adopt a single position with regard to the draft agreement on federalization of the Republic of Moldova". Although they knew that PRT consists of at least three groups sharing different views on the draft federalization of the Republic of Moldova: from its categorical rejection to its total acceptance.

Despite Communists' estimations, the PRT didn't broke apart after certain parties had refused to sign the Declaration on the Federalization of the Republic of Moldova. On the contrary, at the September 4 PRT session political parties passed a "Memorandum on the enforcement of the PACE Resolution", which is to be submitted to the PACE delegation. The fact that the Memorandum was included on the agenda of the PACE delegation determined the Communist Party to send its representative to the PRT session. By doing so, the Communist Party intended to highlight its efforts to comply with the PACE Resolution, namely amending the Law on the Deputy Status so as to enlarge the opposition rights, the Parliament Regulation, the Law on Government, etc. Participants to the PRT took into consideration above said and even were indulgent to the request of the Communist representative to exclude for the Memorandum the following "stopping the Communist offence on the rule of law and fundamental human freedoms". However, the wording of the document is harsh and insinuates that "the ruling party complied with only one of the PACE recommendations, namely registered Bessarabian Church". As for the rest of PACE recommendations, participants to the PRT believe the ruling party only mocked their enforcement, this is especially true with regard to turning "Teleradio-Moldova" into a public institution, stopping the dissolution of local autonomy, independence of the judiciary system, moratorium on the language and history issues.

Thus, the said Memorandum may become the first document to prove the usefulness of the Permanent Round Table and determine the revision of its Regulation so as to make its activity more efficient. On the other hand, PRT is not a universal instrument for settling all the existing problems and for unifying political parties, but rather an instrument for political consultations and meaningful dialogue between opposition and ruling party. In fact this is exactly why the Permanent Round Table was initially established.

Fall political season

September 2, 2002

On September 1 the fall political season began. Given upcoming local elections to be held next May, the major concern of political parties right now is getting ready for elections. During the National Voters' Assembly (NVA) it organized on September 1, Christian-Democratic Peoples' Party faction in Parliament voiced its position "against communist stupidity, antichrist atheism, poverty, corruption, denationalization, censure, as well as federalization of the Republic of Moldova (RM)". Furthermore, Christian-Democrats criticized Moldovan authorities for obstructing citizens residing outside Chisinau to attend the NVA by employing Information and Security Service, Ministry of Internal Affairs, Ministry of Education, etc. That explains the relatively low turnout (some agencies reported that 4,000 people attended the NVA, however organizers insist on 25,000 participants). Also, the NVA organizers announced that one of the immediate actions to be undertaken by the party would be to brief Council of Europe rapporteurs on the Republic of Moldova who are due on a visit in mid-September, that authorities have so far only mocked the enforcement of CE Parliamentary Assembly's Resolution. Christian-Democrat leaders claim that the persecution of the organizers and participants to the anti-Communist protest rallies of January 9 - April 25 are ongoing despite Council of Europe recommendations. In addition, they claim the Communist authorities did not observe the moratorium on revising educational policies related to language and history study as they promote a policy of "Russian-izing" the education. It worth mentioning that anti-CIS and pro-NATO slogans were heard at the Voters' Assembly.

It goes without saying, that authorities' intention to settle the Transdnistrian conflict via federalization, based on draft Agreement between the Republic of Moldova and Transdnistria developed by OSCE and guarantor countries Russia and Ukraine, has even further instigated the protest rallies. In this respect it was decided that the next NVA would be held on October 6.

Federalization issue has taken the center stage. It's very likely that the electoral coalitions in view of 2003 local elections shall be formed around opinions shared by relevant parties with regard to Republic of Moldova federalization. One may say several political groups have been formed that took a stance with regard to the said issue. The first one includes center-right political parties, which openly oppose federalization. According to them Tiraspol regime is a criminal one and entering in federation with it would mean to recognize and legalize it. Some of the parties that oppose federalization include Christian-Democratic Peoples' Party, Liberal Party, Social Liberal Party as well as other small parties. Noteworthy, Christian-Democrats stand out among other parties opposing federalization. Thus, Tara reflecting Christian-Democrat values advocates for a union of states, i.e. the Republic of Moldova and Transdnistria, similar to that of Serbia and Montenegro, rather than for a federation, which might result in a diminished national identity of the indigenous population of the Republic of Moldova (RM).

The second political group, which unequivocally supports the federalization of the RM, includes political parties in governing between 1994 - 1998, namely Agrarian Democratic Party, Socialist Party and Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova. The last two used to be part of the Internationalist Movement "Edinstvo" (Unity) until its dissolution.

The third political group includes political parties that used to revolution around the former President, Petru Lucinschi, namely Social-Democratic Alliance headed by the former Prime-Minister Dumitru Braghis and Centrist Union. They support the federalization of the Republic of Moldova based on the OSCE draft, however they believe some of its aspects should be more detailed. Furthermore, leaders of the said parties claim the number of the would-be federation subjects should be extended so as each administrative-territorial unit to become a federation subject.

And last but not least, there is the Communist Party. The governing party saluted the federalization initiative, however the party leaders insinuated that the draft should be revised, but refrained from commenting what exactly should be revised. In fact President Vladimir Voronin has already started accelerating the negotiations with Transdnistrian leaders. In this respect on August 1 he established the National Commission for Republic of Moldova Reintegration, later on he addressed to the mediators and Tiraspol administration with an initiative to resume the negotiation process. Needless to say the negotiations would be tough. Tiraspol leaders are obsessed by the idea of equality of the negotiation parties, they went so far as to deny Chisinau at least the right to set the negotiation date. In this context, they viewed President Voronin's initiative as an act destabilizing the negotiations formula of the five parties (Moldova, Transdnistria, OSCE, Russia, Ukraine). Tiraspol's intentions are best illustrated by the words of Valeri Litskai, head of Transdnistrian diplomacy, namely that the negotiations would continue for many-many years.

Although both conflicting parties saluted OSCE draft on the federalization of the Republic of Moldova it is still unclear how the Agreement provisions would be enforced. In the case of the Republic of Moldova, this is even more complicated. Federalization is imposed from outside. That is why, the guarantees to the stability of the would-be Moldovan Federation should be also from outside, exactly as was the case of Bosnia. This somehow justifies the fears of the Moldovan opposition that Republic of Moldova would lose its sovereignty by accepting federalization as a solution to the Transdnistrian conflict.

Furthermore, the opposition warns Communist governing that federations established according to ethnic and ideological criteria fall apart sooner or later (an illustration of this may be USSR, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia). Succeeded only federations where the great majority of the population supported the unification and its symbols. This was possible in the countries characterized by ethnic homogeneity, like Germany, or by a homogeneous distribution of heterogeneous elements, like United States of America, which had a cultural, language, and religious homogeneity of the governing elite. There were a series of other factors which contributed to the strengthening of the American Federation, such as a unifying war against colonization (followed by a long period of peace) and the rich natural resources are not to be neglected as well.

If we are to compare the factors known as generating stability in a federation to those known to generate instability, one may find out that the balance is not in favor of Moldova's federalization. Indeed, let's only consider the following: it is expected that Moldovan Federation would include subjects formed according to some ethnic criteria; one of the goals of the governing party striving to reunite the country is to build a communist society; guarantor countries which contributed to the edification of the breakaway Transdnistrian regime do not hide their interests in that territory; and after all the country is to be reunified

after a war, which is still perceived differently by the citizens of both sides due to propagandistic efforts of Chisinau and Tiraspol.

The conflict between Chisinau and Tiraspol deepened last year at the time the big western powers headed by USA and Russia engaged into a global fight against terrorism and proliferation of nuclear weapons. It seems that both Moldovan and Transdnistrian leadership accepted the federalization recommended for the fear not to displease big powers. Probably, the risk that the propaganda war between Chisinau and Tiraspol might degenerate into a full-scale war determined US to get actively involved in this conflict resolution. There is no question that it was the US involvement, which accelerated the elaboration of a draft Agreement. Although, US decision to support federalization took Moldovan opposition by surprise, US had all the grounds to adopt such a decision. Firstly, the draft Agreement clearly defines the "joint state" notion, which Republic of Moldova engaged to jointly edify with Transdnistria as back as 1997. Secondly, Smirnov regime has proved its sustainability and is probably seen by US administration as a party equal to Chisinau at the negotiation table, in fact as the aforesaid Memorandum provides. Thirdly, it's clear that the new strategic partners Russia and US make mutual concessions to each other in the former soviet region, and this stands true not only for Middle East and Caucasus but also for the Transdnistrian conflict settlement.

Still Moldovan opposition believes it was not fair for the country leadership to accept federalization right from the beginning, without even trying to convince guarantor countries that there are other ways of settling the conflict. If we are to admit that the conflict resolution greatly depends on the position of big powers, then Republic of Moldova should have undertaken an upscale diplomatic effort to convince them that the Spanish model of settling the conflict between the center and its provinces is far more adequate for the Republic of Moldova. Spanish Constitution adopted in 1978 makes no reference to federalization; rather it refers to "the state of autonomies". And this, in order to discourage any attempts of future separatism, although experts in the constitutional law claim Spanish provinces enjoy the same rights as the subjects of a federate state.

Another reason for the tension between opposition and Communist governing is that Communists turned the discussions on federalization into a propaganda campaign aimed to denigrate the opposition by labeling as anti-State. However, upon a would-be federalization the arguments brought up by the opposition are not to be neglected at all. The fact that one of the Governing party goals is still rebuilding the federation of the former soviet republics and their electoral promise to adhere to the Russia - Belarus Union run counter to their own declarations on the edification of an independent Moldovan state. This contrast deepened even further when Communists accepted federalization based on a draft Agreement adapted after the model of Constitution of the Russian Federation. Noteworthy this year State Duma of the Russian Federation adopted a special law on accepting new subjects into the Federation. It seems that the law is already applied, as during the meeting Vladimir Putin had with Alexandr Lukashenko, Belarus was invited to become the 90th subject of the Russian Federation. Thus, opposition suspects that favorable conditions are set for the Republic of Moldova integration along with Belarus into the Russian Federation.

All above said coupled with mutual suspicions of the governing and opposition only perpetrates the conflict into the new political season.

